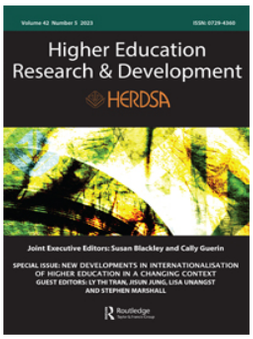

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Higher Education Research & Development

ISSN: 0729-4360 (Print) 1469-8366 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/cher20

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To cite this article: Lisa Ruth Brunner (2023) Settler nation-building through immigration as a rationale for higher education: a critical discourse analysis, Higher Education Research & Development, 42:5, 1086-1102, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2023.2193732

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2193732

HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT
2023, VOL. 42, NO. 5, 1086–1102
https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2193732

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Settler nation-building through immigration as a rationale for higher education: a critical discourse analysis

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ABSTRACT

As education-migration (*edugration*) blurs the line between international student and immigrant recruitment in some jurisdictions, higher education admission is becoming linked to settler nation-building projects. Using critical discourse analysis, this article examines the Canadian higher education sector's response to COVID-19 through pre-budget submissions to the House of Commons of Canada Standing Committee on Finance for the 2021 federal budget. Findings demonstrate how institutions instrumentalized international students to position themselves as valuable actors in Canada's immigration regime and justify their requests for public financial support. In this way, nation-building through immigration – both globally, as an imperial power, and domestically, as a colonial power – is now a new societal role of higher education which is becoming hegemonic within institutions. This is significant because, as higher education's purposes align with those of economic immigration, the sector not only fails to interrupt, but itself reproduces, systemic patterns of border imperialism and settler-colonialism. The article urges higher education institutions to (1) more deeply consider how a reliance on international student enrolment is impacting its societal roles, while also (2) avoid exceptionalizing the present by recognizing that higher education has long functioned in the service of the state as a colonial and imperialist power.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 1 November 2022
Accepted 12 February 2023

KEYWORDS
Nation-building; border imperialism; settler colonialism; edugration; international students; internationalisation; international education; critical discourse analysis

Introduction

Since the late twentieth century, states have increasingly selected immigrants based on so-called *merit* – that is, potential economic contributions and aspiration for socio-economic upward mobility – rather than *origin* (Shachar, 2016). Today, economic immigration is a globally competitive process as jurisdictions reconfigure the boundaries of their membership to attract the 'best and brightest' in a supposedly meritocratic race for talent. The recruitment and retention of international students (IS) is part of this race.

Once seen as sojourners with only temporary intentions, IS are now cast throughout much of the Global North as 'easily-integrated', 'ideal' immigrants (Sabzalieva et al., 2022; Tremblay, 2005; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2017). Most OECD countries offer targeted

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education-migration, or *edugration*, pathways which explicitly connect short-term IS *mobility* to longer-term IS *migration* through post-graduation work and settlement opportunities – some of which include permanent *immigration* options (Brunner, 2022a; OECD, 2022). Retention rates vary but are increasing overall, with IS now 'a key feeder for labour migration' in the OECD (OECD, 2022, chapter 7). As a result, many higher education institutions (HEIs) play new roles as agents in both the indirect (Flynn & Bauder, 2015) and direct (Brunner, 2017; Schinnerl, 2021) selection of immigrants.

This article explores how HEIs position their growing involvement in immigration. Specifically, it examines appeals made by Canadian HEIs to the government in the turbulent summer of 2020, when COVID-19 travel restrictions threatened IS enrolment targets. Through critical discourse analysis (CDA), the article shows that HEIs justified their requests in part by self-identifying as immigration actors and positioning that role as a valuable function of HE – a relatively new rhetorical strategy. More broadly, the article aims to highlight the imperial and colonial dynamics of nation-building within such discourses. While both extractive colonialism and settler-colonialism are at play (and, indeed, are intertwined) (Tuck & Yang, 2012), the article focuses primarily on the latter in the Canadian context.

Rationales for higher education

Early justifications for public HE argued that, through teaching, research, and public service, HE would serve the public good and benefit society (Scott, 2006). However, definitions of 'public good' and 'society' have changed as individual states, and eventually a globalized body of states, developed (Dillabough, 2022; Marginson, 2011; Williams, 2016). For much of the modern era, HE's mission was bound by the state under which it was organized (Scott, 2006), but three interrelated shifts occurred.

First, post-WWII theories of human capital fuelled the view that HE primarily benefits individuals who should pay for its costs; in neoliberalized environments, HE became seen as a private good (Newfield, 2008). Second, rankings and prestige came to drive HE agendas (Seeber et al., 2016). Third, globalization shifted the role of the state in light of global market capitalism, the global knowledge economy, and the development of a global status hierarchy. While many stressed the economic and geopolitical 'weakening' of the state (de Wit, 2019; Marginson, 2011), others cautioned against such oversimplifications, noting that the neoliberal state is not 'simply a deregulationist, absentee state', but rather takes 'a variety of institutional forms' (Tickell & Peck, 2003, p. 181) and in some ways has strengthened (Mann, 1997). These shifts informed the internationalization of HE.

Rationales for the internationalization of higher education

HE justifies internationalization in different ways. These rationales have been categorized as political and economic (de Wit, 1999); idealistic, instrumentalist, and educationalist (Stier, 2004); short-term neoliberal and long-term comprehensive quality approaches (de Wit, 2019); and market-driven and ethically-driven (Guo & Guo, 2017). Many scholars hoped internationalization would emphasize ethical goals by being a 'service to the

body of worldwide nation-states' (Scott, 2006, p. 33) and maximizing global public goods (Marginson, 2011, p. 430). However, as a well-developed body of literature within critical university and critical internationalization studies argues, HE has always been, and continues to be, unjustly entangled with the state and capital – even as the specific configurations of these relationships change over time (Stein, 2021a). Despite efforts to the contrary (e.g., de Wit, 2020), economic and pragmatic goals dominate internationalization's agenda (Guo & Guo, 2017). Just as HE more generally has perpetually reproduced, if not exacerbated, social inequities (Stein, 2021b), internationalization distributes its benefits in uneven and problematic – yet predictable – ways (Unterhalter & Carpentier, 2010).

For example, HE's meritocratic underpinnings helped propel an internationalized global meritocracy. The belief that 'the most talented, the hardest working, and the most virtuous get and should get the most rewards' (McNamee & Miller, 2009, p. 4) within systems organized and constrained by state boundaries have long ensured the alleged 'equality of opportunity not for all but for some' (Tannock, 2009, p. 202). Internationalization elevated the fantasy of HE's level playing field – i.e., not only that meritocracy is just, but that it exists in HE in the first place and is not a smokescreen for rewarding pre-existing privileges (Stein, 2021b) – to a transnational, 'borderless' level. This global, yet state-mediated, 'meritocratic' system is increasingly entangled with immigration regimes' competition for the 'best of the best' through IS recruitment. I next offer a brief overview of the relationship between immigration and settler nation-building before explaining their connections to IS migration.

Settler nation-building through immigration

Immigration policies have long been used to build specific, planned populations. What was once an explicitly racist selection process (Fine, 2016; Perry, 2001) is now largely based on allegedly objective, neutral, and rational 'meritocratic' measurements of human capital (Ellermann, 2020). However, merit-based criteria are still by definition discriminatory, reflecting existing global inequities and continuing the traditionally racist (Bhuyan et al., 2017) and elite (Winter, 2021) project of nation-building regulated by a global meritocratic immigration system.

At its core, modern migration control is 'about regulating North–South relationships and maintaining inequality' (Castles, 2004, p. 223). Because citizenships confer uneven rights, inherited citizenship in certain countries functions as a form of privilege – i.e., the 'birthright lottery' (Shachar, 2009). Wealthy states capitalize on their discretionary control in 'talent for citizenship' exchanges (Shachar, 2006, p. 148), further concentrating human capital in wealthy states.

Through the lens of border imperialism, we are also reminded that immigration to settler states is one of both settler and exploitation colonialism (Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Mayblin & Turner, 2021; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Border imperialism refers to the process of policing who is included and excluded in the nation-state (Walia, 2013). While many fail to recognize 'the constitutive role played by settler colonialism in the development of settler states and their societies' (Ellermann & O'Heran, 2021, p. 21), the role of colonialism is central to understanding border imperialism. It echoes Indigenous critical theory which 'asks that settler, native, and arrivant each acknowledge their

own positions within empire and then reconceptualize space and history to make visible what imperialism and its resultant settler colonialisms and diasporas have sought to obscure' (Byrd, 2011, p. xxx). All forms of (im)migration to settler-colonial states are tied to settler-colonialism, even though some mobility results (directly or indirectly) from exploitative colonialism and implies differing ethical positions (Chatterjee, 2019; Moreton-Robinson, 2003; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This is often overlooked by non-Indigenous scholars who centre immigration as a historical 'event' foundational to nationhood in settler-states, rather than position settler-colonialism as an organizing structure and ongoing process (Tuck & Yang, 2012). However, these sanctioned ignorances, along with many foundational concepts within the study of migration – e.g., the legitimacy of international borders, settler state sovereignty, settler citizenship, and immigrant 'integration' into settler society – are being slowly 'unsettled' (e.g., Mayblin & Turner, 2021), a process also needed within the study of IS migration.

Settler nation-building through immigration in the context of international student migration

The colonial relationship between immigration and nation-building connects to IS migration through the entangled admissions procedures of (1) HEIs and (2) economic immigration systems. Both arguably, yet unevenly, serve both individual and collective rights (Lehr, 2008). Both are inherently discriminatory in their intentional shaping of particular membership bodies, yet their right to discriminate is largely accepted by society. Both operate within a global meritocratic system mediated by states and have shifted, over time, from functioning as gatekeeps to recruiters. And both are tied to ethical questions about social mobility and colonialism.

As discussed, *edugration's* reliance on IS as immigrants refashions HEIs' admissions processes as actors in immigration selection systems. However, the two adjudication processes differ: economic immigration admissions have a clear (albiet contested) objective to maximize immigration's economic benefits for the state. HE admissions have multiple (and often contradictory) objectives.

This has important implications. As the line between IS and immigrant recruitment blurs, HE admission becomes systemically linked to larger economic-driven nation-building projects (Johnstone & Lee, 2014; Waters & Brooks, 2021). Because many *edugration*-focused countries are settler-colonial states, this also implicates HE in settler-colonialism (MacElheron, 2022), although not for the first time (Patel, 2021; Peace, 2016; Stein, 2018; 2022). However, this fact is often overlooked by scholars who write about IS migration and nation-building (e.g., Waters & Brooks, 2021), and HE's participation in ongoing settler-colonialism necessitates increased attention (MacElheron, 2022; Stein, 2022).

The Canadian context: 'universities as the Pier 21'

As a settler state, Canada is founded on, and continues to be structured by, the forcible elimination, relocation, and assimilation of Indigenous peoples (Barker, 2009). Immigration historically functioned as one way 'to displace Aboriginal populations and assert a specific brand of white dominance', e.g., during immigration from Britain in the 1800s

(Perry, 2001, p. 132). While Canadian immigration's legitimizing discourses have shifted over time, contemporary labour recruitment through immigration continues to be a colonial project (Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Alongside Australia, Canada is known for both merit-based immigrant selection (starting from the late 1960s) and *edugration* (from the early 2000s) policy development. Today, Canada is dependent on IS for economic and demographic reasons, and the federal government openly connects IS mobility to immigration goals (Brunner, 2022b). However, HEIs' own engagement with the retention of IS graduates as immigrants has been uneven, uncoordinated, voluntary, and largely unacknowledged (Akbar, 2022; Bozheva, 2020b).

Over the past several decades, the sector has stressed the importance of IS to internationalization strategies (Buckner et al., 2020) and engaged in some immigration-related HE lobbying objectives, e.g., for faster, less restrictive processing of study permits; a national approach to marketing Canada as a study destination; and providing IS easier access to Canada's labour market (Schinnerl, 2021). In some regions, IS have been positioned as an antidote to declining university-aged Canadian populations, although until recently this focused on boosting student enrolment rather than permanent immigration (Buckner et al., 2020). There are also some examples of the Canadian Bureau for International Education connecting IS recruitment to immigration, e.g., noting in 2013 that increased 'marketing of Canada's education brand' (p. 3) would 'attract a substantial number of talented students to remain as immigrants' (p. 4). However, it has been rare for HEIs to be as blunt as the president of Universities Canada (UC) who, in 2016, described universities as 'the Pier 21 of the 21st century', referring to the ocean liner terminal where close to one million immigrants to Canada were processed in the mid-twentieth century (Chiose, 2016, para. 5). Only recently has the sector advocated for clearer and easier IS pathways to permanent residency (PR), indicating a potential turn towards 'a more cohesive university-government approach' (Bozheva, 2020a; Schinnerl, 2021).

This reflects the changing role of Canadian HEIs, which are now 'de facto portal[s] for migration' (Schinnerl, 2021, p. v) and 'immigrant settlement hubs' (p. 200). These changing roles were first identified when HEIs in 'second-tier' cities played an outsized role in supporting IS' settlement (Walton-Roberts, 2011). However, subsequent immigration policies have accelerated HE's immigration role nationally. Because immigrant recruitment, selection, and settlement are traditionally funded and managed by the state, HEIs' performance of these roles is a significant shift.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and early 2021, significant high-level lobbying activity occurred between the HE sector and senior federal government officials on the topic of immigration (Schinnerl, 2021). This article cannot comment on the details of that lobbying; instead, it asks how IS were publicly positioned by HEIs in their initial COVID-19 responses to the federal government. To do so, a CDA focusing on the development of the 2021 budget was conducted.

Approach

Stemming from the overlapping traditions of discourse studies, feminist post-structuralism, and critical linguistics, CDA was largely developed by Fairclough (1995), who

viewed language as part of, and interconnected with, social life (2003). Fairclough believed that social analysis required consideration of 'how language as a cultural tool mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge' (Rogers et al., 2005, p. 367). CDA can be classified into multiple qualitative approaches, each sharing three qualities: (1) a focus on revealing and altering inequitable conditions; (2) a move beyond language interpretation to show the social performativity of language; and (3) a recognition that standpoints are never neutral and always contextually-embedded (Mullet, 2018).

In CDA, discourse typically refers to 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1971/1972, p. 52), or, in Fairclough's words, 'different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice' (1992, p. 3). Discourse is thus 'socially constructive' as it constitutes 'social subjects, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief' (Fairclough, 1992, p. 36). As discourse constitutes social practice, it is simultaneously constituted by it, resulting in a dialectical relationship. In the context of the internationalization of HE, discourses of IS are powerful in their deployment of seemingly neutral, yet in fact normative, language which becomes hegemonic and structures the way IS are understood and related to (Mertanen et al., 2020). This study investigates the discourses underpinning the positioning of IS by institutions through text, which forms and structures IS as subjects in particular ways.

The study followed a modified version of Mullet's (2018) Generic Analytical Framework, which incorporates common characteristics and processes from CDA scholarship in the 1990s (e.g., that of Fairclough, Kress, Van Leeuwen, Van Dijk, and Wodak). In line with Mullet, I followed seven steps; see Table 1.

Contextualizing pre-budget consultation submissions as a data source

Pre-budget consultation submissions have been used to research the Canadian internationalization policy process (Bozheva, 2020a; Viczko & Tascón, 2016) but are not a common data source. Because they appeal to the federal government for funds,

Table 1. CDA stages and application, adapted from Mullet (2018).

Stage of analysis	Application
Stage 1: Select the discourse	Selected HE institutions' positioning of IS in their responses to COVID-19
Stage 2: Locate and prepare data sources	Selected 48 Pre-budget Consultation Submissions to the House of Commons of Canada Standing Committee on Finance in advance of the 2021 budget
Stage 3: Explore the background of each text	Considered the social and historical context of pre-budget consultation submissions, e.g., its intended audience and purpose, production process, etc.
Stage 4: Identify overarching themes	After reading and re-reading the selected texts, used thematic analysis to identify four overarching (discursive) themes
Stages 5: Analyze the external relations in the texts (interdiscursivity)	Considered the social practices, social norms, and social structures between the texts
Stage 6: Analyze the internal relations in the texts	Considered the 'patterns, words, and linguistic devices that represent power relations, social context (e.g., events, actors, or locations), or … positionalities' (Mullet, 2018, p. 124)
Stage 7: Interpret the data	Put the 'structural features and individual fragments … into the broader context and themes established' (Mullet, 2018, p. 122) and connected them to other discourses, e.g., nation-building

submitters are, in essence, justifying their request's value to Canadian interests in relation to other national concerns. This tends to evoke strategic economic language more so than other document types, e.g., strategic plans. Still, they are useful not only because 'money talks' – reflecting HEIs' 'real' priorities – but because they reveal the ways actors publicly position those priorities.

Like all data sources, pre-budget submissions have limitations. First, they reflect concerns related to policy levers under the federal government's jurisdiction. This has important implications for this study, given the federal government has limited control over provincially and territorially-managed HE systems (despite being responsible for Canada's national international education strategy). Second, a submission is a budgetary request and thus 'not a policy statement in terms of governing specific legislative edicts' – still, they are 'nonetheless influential on the national policy landscape' (Viczko & Tascón, 2016, p. 8).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020–21 fiscal year budget (initially scheduled for presentation in March 2020) was delayed. The Canadian federal budget presented in April 2021 thus covered both the 2020–21 and 2021–22 fiscal years. Briefs were due August 7, 2020, approximately five months after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. It was a tumultuous time for Canadian HE; IS entry to Canada was still restricted, and HEIs were uncertain what percentage of students would enrol in their mostly online courses in September.

792 briefs from a range of sectors were submitted in advance of the 2021 budget. To determine the data set, I first selected all briefs submitted by the HE sector, including HEIs (27 briefs, the majority [22] universities), HEI associations (9 briefs), and HE student organizations and associations (6 briefs). Through a keyword search and document scans, I then identified 6 additional briefs submitted from other sectors which engaged with the phrases 'international students', 'post-secondary', and/or 'higher education' in a substantive way. In total, I analyzed 48 briefs.

Overarching (discursive) themes

I drew on Clarke and Braun (2014) to construct overarching themes and subthemes. I first read and re-read the texts to identify relevant sections referring to IS, immigrants, and/or immigration. Then, using a combination of deductive and inductive coding, I further analyzed all relevant sections of the texts to construct overarching themes and categorize the texts into one or more codes.

It soon became clear that the study's orienting question encompassed multiple discourses. According to Clarke and Braun (2014), in thematic analysis, *codes* capture 'both semantic (surface) meaning within the data and latent (underlying) meaning' which are 'of potential relevance to the research question', while *themes* are 'broader patterns of meaning within the data' constructed from coding (p. 1948). However, what I identified were not merely patterns but 'underlying systems of meaning', or discourses, themselves (Taylor & Ussher, 2001, p. 297). The study thus departs from Mullet (2018) in this step; instead, it resonates with thematic discourse analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2014; Taylor & Ussher, 2001) in which a thematic analysis demonstrates multiple discursive themes within the initial overarching discourse. In what follows, I outline four discursive themes.

Discursive theme 1: HE's economic dependence on international students

The first and most prominent discursive theme was, unsurprisingly, HE's well-documented economic dependence on IS. It acknowledged COVID-19's negative impact (whether experienced or potential) on IS-generated revenue. Within this discursive theme, the texts presented three related subthemes representing possible responses to COVID-19's revenue impacts. See Figure 1.

The first subtheme (1A) called for supplementary investments to make up for lost revenue. This theme was present in the submissions of large organizations such as the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, which requested 'a federal back stop to offset revenue losses caused by a decline in IS enrollments'. In another example, York University proposed the government 'offset [IS] losses with a dedicated federal transfer to universities in the event of a drop in [IS]'.

The second (1B) called for an increase in IS recruitment. Within this request, three additional sub-subthemes arose alongside justifications for increased IS recruitment: 1B(i) to enhance HE's quality more generally (e.g., the Association of Atlantic Universities wrote 'to continue to attract the [IS] essential to our funding model, we must work together to provide modern, online classrooms'); 1B(ii) to diversify IS recruitment; and 1B(iii) to improve international branding. 1B(iii) was particularly common.

The third and least common response (subtheme 1C) questioned the sustainability of HE's funding model and its dependence on IS. The Thompson Rivers University Students' Union, for example, urged the federal government to 'start the process of revising the existing international education strategy to account for the new reality and challenges that are being faced in this sector'.

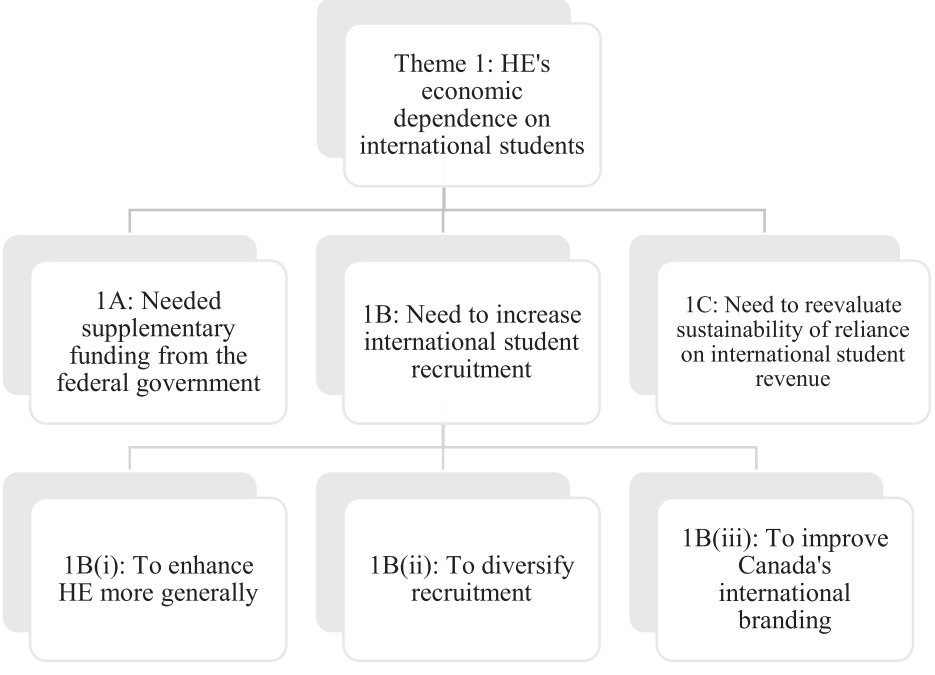

Figure 1. Discursive theme 1: HE's economic dependence on international students.

Discursive theme 2: international students as valuable national subjects

The second discursive theme focused on the national value of IS. Within this theme, four sub-themes emerged. The briefs focused on IS' contributions to national and/or regional economic growth; their value to nation building (nationally); and their value to Francophone immigration objectives. See Figure 2.

Discussions of IS as valuable to national economic growth (subtheme 2A) included comments which identified the economic value of IS without explicitly linking them to permanent immigration. For example, École de technologie supérieure noted that 'the inversion of the demographic pyramid is particularly worrisome in terms of the sustainability of the Canadian social safety net and the economic growth of the country that supports it [and] the presence of [IS] is a valuable resource, not only for Canadian university campuses, but for the country as a whole'. Although these comments implicitly relate to IS as immigrants, because there was no clear mention of permanent immigration, they remained in this subtheme.

Discussions of IS as explicitly valuable to Canadian nation building through immigration (subtheme 2B) were made in many briefs, most of which were also related to the national economic value of subtheme 2A. Both Colleges Ontario and Colleges & Institutes Canada noted that 'the government must build on previous investments in Canada's International Education Strategy by … facilitating transitions to PR and citizenship to meet immigration targets'. Student associations urged the government to 'invest in post-graduation retention of our [IS]' (Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association [WUSA]), claiming that 'supporting in [IS] is … an investment in future Canadians' (British Columbia Institute of Technology [BCIT] Student Association). HEIs discussed the need to 'stabilize university recruitment and encourage a strong pipeline of [IS] and potential immigrants' (Toronto Metropolitan University),[1] since 'the economic and social benefits that [IS] bring to Canada will be crucial, particularly at a time when other avenues of much needed immigration will be slowed' (McMaster University).

Discussions of IS as valuable for regional economic growth and revitalization (subtheme 2C) were also numerous, focusing on benefits to the Prairies, Atlantic Canada, and smaller urban centres. The Association of Atlantic Universities noted, 'Atlantic Canada faces unique economic and social challenges, including an aging population' and that federal investments were 'critical to … success in supporting immigration and

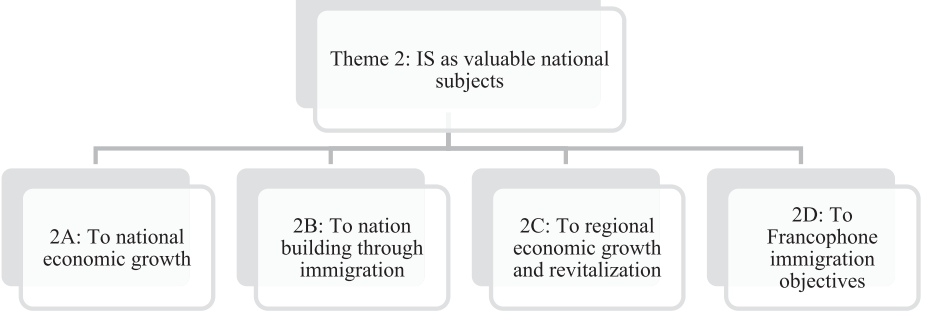

Figure 2. Discursive theme 2: International students as valuable national subjects.

regional population growth'. Lakehead University wrote that they 'focused on increasing international enrolment with a goal of developing a highly-skilled workforce in the regions we serve' and that IS are 'often staying after graduation to build lives and careers'. UC noted that 'after graduation, [IS] become highly trained individuals who contribute to their local Canadian economies, revitalizing regions of the country struggling with outmigration and population decline', and envisioned universities as 'regional hubs for employment and immigration'.

Finally, the value of IS to Francophone immigration goals (subtheme 2D) was clear in statements such as those of Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie Canadienne [ACUFC], which wrote that their member institutions were 'in a position to help the federal government achieve its objectives as regards francophone immigration,' particularly in 'minority communities'.

Discursive theme 3: HEIs as immigration actors

The third discursive theme focused on explicit acknowledgements of HEIs as immigration actors. This entailed two subthemes: HEIs as immigration drivers and HEIs as immigration hubs. See Figure 3.

Subtheme 3A focused on HEIs as immigration drivers. ACUFC noted that its members' 'educational mandate … is balanced with its roles as an economic driver and an immigration hub'. Other less explicit examples included comments by UBC, the University of New Brunswick, and the University of Alberta, all of which noted that HEIs 'are instrumental' and 'play a central role' in the attraction of global talent.

Subtheme 3B included briefs with a focus on the role HEIs play as immigration integration hubs. Université du Québec, for example, noted that 'post-secondary studies helps effectively integrate students into the host society; these students may then choose to immigrate to Canada', while the ACUFC wrote that 'member institutions have succeeded in welcoming and integrating foreign students [and] continued to improve the structures required to receive more immigrants'.

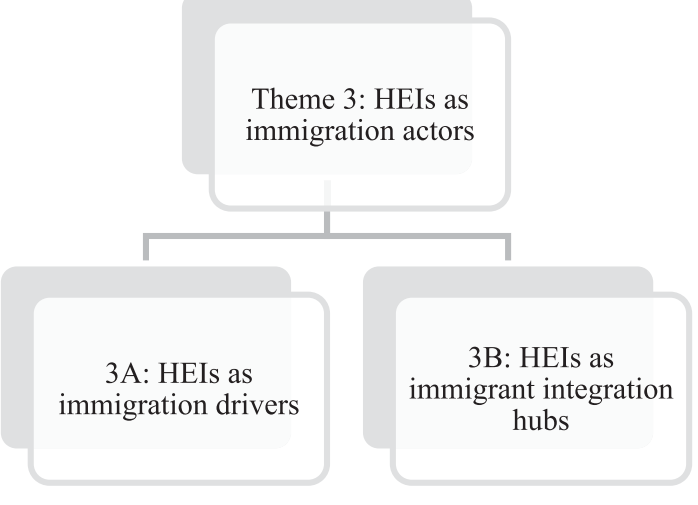

Figure 3. Discursive theme 3: HEIs as immigration actors.

Discursive theme 4: gaps in international student supports

The final and least common discursive theme pointed to gaps in IS supports. When mentioned, they involved two subthemes. See Figure 4.

The first subtheme (4A) pertained to requests that IS not be excluded from direct individual federal support. Only the BCIT Student Association requested COVID-19-specific 'emergency supports for those not usually covered by government benefits'. Other submissions requested non-COVID-19-related supports, such as UBC's suggestion that IS be made eligible for federal scholarships.

The second subtheme (4B) identified potential enhancements to integration-related supports for IS. Briefs with commentary related to the 4B(i) sub-subtheme, such as that of the Centre for Education and Training, critiqued IS' ineligibility for IRCC services and requested increased funding for their 'employment, settlement & language services across Canada'. In another example, the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council made a joint submission with other regional employment organizations, noting that IS 'represent a key, largely untapped, talent pool' and require access to 'the same types of networking, mentoring, job-seeking support offered by the existing settlement sector'.

Others in the 4B(ii) sub-subtheme suggested new integration services for IS to be provided by HE. These included the WUSA's request for 'educational programs that help [IS] improve their English-language proficiency and cultural awareness' and the World Education Services' suggestion of 'a national committee of diverse stakeholders (including employers, licensing bodies, settlement agencies, post-secondary institutions) … with a view to promoting a labour force that is highly-skilled and inclusive'. While the latter committee was proposed to address supports for all newcomers (i.e., not just IS), its inclusion of post-secondary institutions draws HE into the integration discourse.

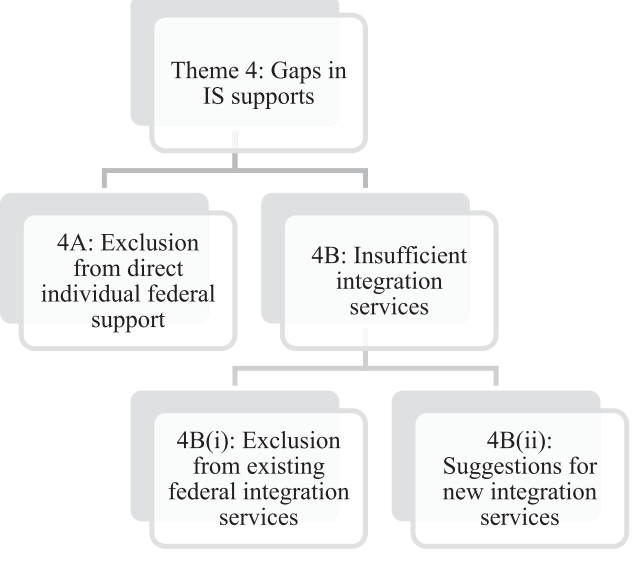

Figure 4. Discursive theme 4: Gaps in international student supports.

Analysis and interpretation

The texts analyzed in this study were part of three interrelated larger discursive themes: (1) the importance of Canadian HE to Canadian society, (2) the vulnerability of Canadian HE, and (3) the centrality of HE in 'building back a better' post-COVID-19 pandemic Canada. These discourses are not surprising, given their intent to influence the Canadian governments' allocation of limited resources during a pandemic. However, the discourses at times contradicted each other, particularly the supposed importance and centrality of Canadian HE alongside its own vulnerability.

Also unsurprisingly, the texts reproduced broader neoliberal, state-centric, zero-sum discourses, e.g., encouraging economic growth through robust labour markets and immigration. They used dramatic language to describe the severity and exceptionality of COVID-19. For example, institutions were 'severely compromised' (College Applied Research Taskforce) and feared a 'severe decrease in [IS] enrollment' (McMaster University). The pandemic was presented as both a source of uncertainty and an unprecedented opportunity to be seized. Additionally, the texts employed familiar (yet nonetheless troubling) extractive, instrumental, and dehumanizing language used to describe IS as objects, e.g., as 'a valuable resource' (École de technologie supérieure) and potentially 'strong pipeline' (TMU). In only one instance was federal funding requested for the explicit benefit of IS' academic goals, i.e., so they could 'focus on their studies' (BCIT Student Association). Even instances where IS were portrayed as valuable for non-economic reasons, such as for 'bring[ing] new perspectives and ideals to local communities' (Lakehead University) or their 'social benefits' (McMaster University), were clearly positioned within a broader neoliberal economic argument.

Overall, HE's recognition of its economic dependence on IS as a vulnerability (discursive theme one) was the most notable focus, pointing to a specific form of 'HE as economically vulnerable' discourse. However, the way the texts addressed responses to this dependence varied. While some called to re-evaluate or alleviate this dependence through increased direct federal funding (both temporarily and permanent), the majority requested federal support to increase IS recruitment. Notably, this recruitment was couched in competitive language similar to that of the global 'race for talent' in which increased recruitment was necessary to improve not only Canada's HE system but its international education brand. In this way, HE's identification of its role as an IS recruitment actor was made clear. This largely aligns with existing literature.

However, in discursive theme two, the recruitment of IS was positioned as additionally valuable for purposes beyond HE – namely, for immigration. Many HEIs indirectly positioned themselves as vital to Canadian nation building, regional economic and population growth, and Francophone objectives as actors within the federal government's economic immigration regime. This role was made particularly clear by HEIs in regions facing a declining population, smaller city centres, and Quebec. This theme mirrors back the federal governments' own 'IS as ideal immigrants' policy discourse, strengthening HE's rationale in the process; even if the sustainability of HE's dependence on IS is perceived as a liability, the value of IS to Canadian society justifies the ongoing support of HE as a key actor in the recruitment process. This logic has not been publicly widespread in HE to date and marks a shift in HE's framing of its value.

Some texts, primarily those submitted by Québécois institutions, went beyond this implicit connection by describing themselves explicitly as immigration actors (discursive theme three). The directness of these claims was stark, particularly the ACUFC's statement that its members 'balanced' their educational mandate with their roles as 'immigration hubs' and were effective in not only 'welcoming', but also 'integrating', IS as immigrants. Yet discursive theme four presented claims that existing IS supports – specifically those related to immigrant integration – were, in fact, insufficient. Several of these claims were made not by HEIs but from the newcomer settlement sector, which (1) positioned IS as temporary workers/immigrants, (2) highlighted their underemployment, and (3) critiqued their ineligibility for most immigrant settlement services. While the number of briefs touching upon theme four was limited, they offered a counter-discourse to HE's success in its integration role.

Discussion

Through *edugration*, the state and HE are becoming reliant on each other in complex ways (Cerna & Chou, 2022). This article speaks to this reliance by uncovering the discourses underpinning the Canadian HE sector's justifications for federal support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many HEIs instrumentalized IS to position themselves as vulnerable yet valuable actors in Canada's economic immigration regime. HEIs' IS recruitment activity was framed as beneficial not only to HEIs themselves but to the broader Canadian settler nation-building project of attracting 'desirable' immigrants. HEIs framed themselves as playing a partnership-like role in immigration and thus deserving of federal support. In this way, HE embraced the federal government's overarching 'IS as ideal immigrants' discourse for its own purposes. While this discourse was mobilized to different degrees based on the importance of immigration to individual institutions' local economies, and was not without (limited) critique, it was presented by a wide range of HEIs, HEI associations, and student associations.

These findings offer one example of how settler nation-building through immigration (Bhuyan et al., 2017) is shaping, and reproduced by, internationalization. HE's willingness to (1) justify IS recruitment for its nation-building role, and (2) highlight its structural reliance on the process, exemplifies the everyday practices of imperialism and colonialism which have become so common-sense, their constitutive nature can be difficult to perceive (Grande, 2018; McCartney, 2020). HE not only fails to interrupt, but itself reproduces, systemic patterns of border imperialism and settler-colonialism it otherwise claims to attend to through purportedly ethical internationalization and reconciliation initiatives.

It is important to avoid exceptionalizing the present by recognizing HE's longstanding function in the service of the state as a colonial and imperialist power (Stein, 2021b). It is difficult for most of us to imagine HE without 'assum[ing] the inevitability and perpetuation of the basic categories and institutions of modern social organization' such as the state (Stein, 2021b, p. 404). Yet, if we accept the challenge, we might ask: How do normalized selection practices in both HE and immigration maintain inequity? Who holds jurisdiction over the selection and admission of newcomers on Indigenous lands and in settler-colonial contexts? How might we take a more nuanced view of HEIs and IS-migrants alike – that is, seeing them in all their complexity, with responsibilities

as participants in settler-colonialism and imperialism? And finally, what purposes do we want our HEIs to serve?

Note

1. Known at the time as Ryerson University.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Sharon Stein, Vanessa Andreotti, Karen Pashby, Roopa Desai Trilokekar, Amrita Hari, Antje Ellermann, Asha Kaushal, and two anonymous reviewers for insightful feedback.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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